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Mush from the wimp – Part Two

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I am, to my continuing dismay, the author of maybe the most notable gaffe in recent newspaper history. Late on the afternoon of March 14, 1980, I wrote a headline over an editorial on an economic plan proposed by President Carter. I meant it as an in-house joke and thought it would be removed before publication. It read: "Mush from the wimp." It appeared in 161,000 copies of the Globe the next day.

Since then, the word "wimp" has appeared repeatedly in political dialogue. Politicians across the country have called their opponents "wimps" and one, Adlai Stevenson 3d of Illinois, even declared that he was not a wimp without any provocation. The New York Daily News, in one political season, kept a wimp count – whether the alleged and self-described wimps won or lost.

The word has recently migrated from political politics to sexual politics with high-minded discussions – in places like Ms. magazine – over whether men in the '80s are wimps, and to literary politics and an assertion – in a front-page story of the New York Times Book Review – that allmales in modern fiction are wimps.

According to all the public opinion polls, much of President Reagan's popu-

larity with male voters, especially with young male voters, is that he is perceived as the antithesis of a wimp, as a standup guy, as a man who "stands tall" for what he believes in and for America. John Wayne reincarnate.

Well, what is the record? In the debate last Sunday, the President placed responsibility for the heinous CIA-produced brochure, the one urging the contras fighting the Nicaraguan government to commit political assassinations, on some low-level personage in Central America. By the time the President got through, the guy sounded almost like a free-lance writer who just happened to stop by the Administration's illegal, not-so-covert war down there.

Later in the debate, the subject turned to the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut. Who was to blame there? When the bombing first occurred, a year ago this week, the President sought initially to blame it on Congress, asserting that it had not supported his Lebanon policy. Later, he foolishly foreclosed any investigation of the circumstances surrounding it – an investigation that conceivably could have produced courts-martial – by taking responsibility.

But what did he have to say at last Sunday's debate about the stationing of the Marines in the airport barracks? "That was a command decision made by

a commander in the field." Some standup guy.

That statement was, in its way, in keeping with the assertions that the President made after the more recent bombing of the US Embassy annex in Beirut: at one point he compared the lack of security to an unfinished kitchen-repair job – it happens to everyone – and at another point seemed to suggest that it was all the fault of President Carter, who, he implied inaccurately, had weakened the CIA's intelligence-gathering capacity.

This is the same macho President who heralds the American invasion of a tiny Caribbean island as a glorious victory for the nation, but has nary an instructive word to say about the mammoth increase in Soviet influence in Syria, and thus in the Mideast, on, as he would say, his watch. Somehow, somewhere, a true definition of toughness, of resolve, has been lost in all of this.

Finally, this is the President who blamed the press for the wide negative reaction to his infamous joke about bombing the Soviets in five minutes. "If the press had kept their mouth shut, no one would have known I said it."

This, especially from a standup guy, is – how should I put it – so much mush. Whence it comes, I dare not say – again.

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